



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ON ACTING, CONSIDERED AS AN IMITATIVE ART.

In the absence of materials for our usual dramatic critique, for the Theatre Royal has been closed since our last publication, we conceive the following remarks, upon the general subject of acting, will prove not unacceptable to our readers: they are taken from the observations of M. Diderot, on a pamphlet, entitled 'Garrick, or the English Actors,' and we are not aware that they have ever before been presented to the public in an English dress.

"I may be wrong, but I have very different ideas from the author as to the principal qualifications of a great actor. I would endow him with a great deal of judgment; I would have him a cool and tranquil spectator of human nature; he should consequently possess much finesse, but no sensibility, or, what amounts to the same thing, he should be master of the art of universal imitation, and possess an equal aptness for all sorts of characters and situations: if he possessed sensibility, he could not possibly play the same part ten times over with the same warmth and success; however impassioned at the first representation, he would be exhausted and cold as marble at the third; on the other hand, an observant imitator of nature, will be an imitator of himself from the first time he enters upon the scene; at the tenth representation, his acting, far from being enfeebled, will be strengthened by all the new reflections which he will have made, and you will be more and more satisfied with his performance.

"The inequality of those actors who play from feeling, confirms me in my opinion. You must not expect any regularity from them; their acting is alternately powerful and weak, impassioned and cold, flat and sublime; they will fail to-morrow in the place where they excelled to-day, and in return they will excel in the passage where they failed before. But those who play from reflection and from the study of human nature, from imitation, from imagination and from memory, are equable, the same at every representation, always equally perfect; every thing is measured, every thing is preconcerted; their warmth has its beginning, its middle, and its end. They preserve the same accents, the same positions, the same movements; if there be any difference between one representation and another, it is always to the advantage of the latter. They are scarcely actors, they are perfect transparencies, always ready to show objects and to show them with the same precision and fidelity. Like the poets they are continually drawing from the inexhaustible fund of nature, whereas they would have soon come to the end of their own peculiar riches.

"What acting can be more perfect than that of Mademoiselle Clairon? Yet, follow her and study her, and you will be soon convinced that she knows all the details of her acting by heart, as well as the words of her part. No doubt she has a model in her head to which she studied in the first instance to conform herself; no doubt her conception of this model has been the highest, the grandest and the most perfect of which she is capable; but this model is not herself; if it was herself, how weak and little would her imitation be! When by dint of industry she has approached as near to this ideal model as she possibly can, then she has done every thing. I have no doubt but she experiences great pain in the first moments of her studies; but when these first moments are past, her soul is calm; she is under her own control, she repeats, almost without any internal emotion: her first attempts

have determined every thing, have fixed the whole in her head; carelessly stretched on her sofa, while she silently traces her part in her memory, with her eyes closed, she can hear and see herself on the stage, and form a judgment of her acting, and of the impressions which she will excite. It is not so with her rival *la Dumesnil*, she comes on the boards without knowing what she will say; three-fourths of her time she does not know what she is saying, but the remainder is sublime.

“And wherefore should the actor differ in this from the statuary, from the painter, from the orator, and from the musician? The characteristic traits do not present themselves at the first ebullition; they come in cold and tranquil moments, in moments altogether unexpected: then, whilst profoundly fixed between human nature and the image which they have sketched from it, they alternately glance with an attentive eye from the one to the other, and the beauties with which they cover their works in this way, are infinitely more certain of success, than those which have been called forth in the first rapture of the imagination. It is not the violent man, the man beside himself, who captivates us, that advantage belongs to the man who is under his own control. Great dramatic poets, in particular, are assiduous observers of all that passes around them; they lay hold of, they register, every thing which strikes them; from these registers it is that so many sublime traits are transfused into their works. Men of warmth, impetuosity, and sensibility, are always acting; they furnish the play but they do not enjoy it; the man of genius copies from them. Great poets, great actors, and perhaps in general all great imitators of nature, of whatever description, endued with a fine imagination, great judgment, delicate tact, and infallible taste, must in my opinion possess the least sensibility of all beings; they are equally adapted for too many things, they are too much occupied in observing and imitating, to be deeply affected within themselves. Consider women, in sensibility they certainly very far surpass us; what comparison is there between them and us in the moment of passion! But as much as we are inferior to them when they act, so much must they yield to us when they imitate. In the great drama, the drama to which I continually revert, that of the world, all the impassioned characters occupy the stage, all the men of genius are in the pit. The former are called fools; the others, who are amused by painting their follies, are called sages; it is the steady eye of the sage which seizes on whatever is ridiculous in so many different personages, who paints it, and who afterwards makes you laugh at the picture of those troublesome originals, whose victim you have sometimes been.

“These truths would be incontestible, but the players will never agree to them: it is their secret. Sensibility is so estimable a quality that they will not acknowledge it to be possible that it is necessary to be free from it in order to excel in their art. What! will you assert that the plaintive and mournful accents, which come from the bottom of that mother's heart, and which so powerfully affect mine, are not inspired by real feeling? Is it not grief itself which produces them?—Not at all; and the proof is that they are regulated, that they form part of a system of declamation, that they are submitted to a law of unity, that they help forward the solution of a given problem: it is that they do not fulfil all the proposed conditions till after long study, that in order to become perfect they have been repeated a hundred times; that the actor then listened to himself, that he does so

in the very moment in which he affects you, and that his whole talent consists, not as you suppose in allowing himself to be borne away by his sensibility, but in imitating so perfectly all its external signs. They are laughers at sensibility who deceive you. The cries of grief are noted in the memory, the gestures of despair have been conned over, the precise moment at which tears should flow, has been calculated. That tremulous voice, those suspended and stifled words, that shudder of the limbs, that tottering of the knees.—All mere imitation; a lesson learned beforehand, a sublime mimicry of which the actor is conscious at the very moment he excites it; which he remembers a long time after it is over, but which does not at all touch his heart, and which, like other exercises, only fatigues his body. When he has laid aside the sock or the buskin, his voice is worn out, he feels extreme weariness, he changes his shirt and goes to bed; but he carries away no portion of grief or vexation, or depression of soul, it is the audience which bears away all these impressions. The actor is tired and the audience is sad, because he has acted without feeling any thing, and it has felt without any action; if it were otherwise the condition of the actor would be the most unhappy of all conditions. Happily both for him and us, he is not the person whom he represents; if it were not for that, how tame and uninteresting would he be! Different sensibilities culled and blended together to produce the greatest possible effect! the supposition is ridiculous. I insist then, that it is sensibility which makes the multitude of middling actors, that it is extreme sensibility which makes shallow and confined actors, that it is the want of sensibility which can alone make a sublime actor. The tears of the player fall freely, those of the man of sensibility mount with difficulty; it is the heart which affects to excess the head of the man of sensibility; it is the head of the player which produces some momentary effect upon his heart."

THE SISTERS.

Ne'er hath the young enthusiast's fervent dreams
Been lighted up with more angelic faces,
Than those in which my fancy's vision traces
Such seraph features for its lovely themes!
Sisters of beauty! so it fondly deems
Of ye, the radiance of whose mental graces
Not time from memory's brightest leaf erases,
In each fair lineament full beauty beams
Sweet chauntresses! what sacred melody
Breathes from the thrillings of your song and lyre.
THINE* is the inspiration from on high,
Which thou hast caught from some full angel choir.
THOU† with earth's music answerest to the sky,
And both in mingling rapture soar still higher!

R. M.

* Mrs. Hemans.

† Miss M. A. Brown.